1. Amulet of Rudolf II (Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien)

The Amulet of Rudolf II: Kabbalistic Talisman and Pansophic Collectible

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Twelve precious stones, the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, twelve signs of the zodiac and twelve angelic names – at first glance, this system of correspondences determines the composition of an amulet that was in the possession of Emperor Rudolf II and is today located in the *Kunstkammer* of the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna (Fig. 1).[1] In the museum, it is labeled as "choshen" – a reference to the breastplate of the Jewish high priest. In fact, this object is much more than a mere allusion to a Biblical artefact. Its complex and partly ambiguous iconography on the obverse and reverse derives from a fruitful conjunction of several intellectual trends that could simultaneously be observed at the court of Rudolf II which makes it a symbol of the pansophic mindset par excellence.

A three-layered onyx forms the heart of the object. The stone's brown center is engraved with a seven-lamp, the Jewish menorah. Above this symbol of "supreme knowledge"[2] floats a heraldic imperial crown. These figurative elements are surrounded by a Hebrew inscription engraved with an astounding precision which is clearly legible and translates as follows:

> "The Emperor Rudolf / AGLA[3] [You are eternally powerful o Lord] / may God Almighty

1 Research on this topic would not have been possible without the generous and untiring support of Paulus Rainer who provided me with information and images on this object and continuously discussed research questions with me via e-mail. When I was finally able to travel to Vienna after the internationally enforced lockdown due to Covid-19, he and his colleagues Helene Hanzer and Barbara Goldmann dedicated an entire afternoon to examining the amulet with me in the restoration laboratory of the Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien (August 11th, 2020). I am absolutely indebted to their many useful observations and comments. I would like to thank the Society for the History of Alchemy and Chemistry (SHAC) for funding my stay in Vienna as well as Paulus Rainer and Ivo Purš for reading and improving previous versions of this essay.

On this object (KHM Wien, Antikensammlung, XII 383) see: Amulett in Form eines Choschen, in *Prag um 1600*, p. 603, cat. no. 505 [Ann Swersky is in fact the author of this catalog entry. By mistake it was published under another name]; Ann Swersky, The Choschen presented by the Jews of Prague to Kaiser Rudolf II., *Jewellery Studies* 4 (1990), pp. 33–36; Michel Duchamp, Les intailles en cristal de roche et en agates, *Revue de Gemmologie*, nr. 117 (1993), pp. 4–7 (5–6); Richard I. Cohen and Vivian B. Mann, Melding Worlds: Court Jews and the Arts of the Baroque, in *From Court Jews to the Rothschilds: Art, Patronage, and Power: 1600–1800*, ed. by Vivian B. Mann, exh. cat. (New York, 1996), pp. 97–123; Vivian B. Mann, A Court Jew's Silver Cup, *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 43 (2008), pp. 131–140 and p. 181, cat. no. 115; Ivo Purš, The Intellectual World of Rudolf II and the Kabbalah, in *Path of Life: Rabbi Judah Loew ben Bezalel, ca. 1525–1609*, ed. by Alexandr Putík and Peter Demetz, exh. cat. (Prague, 2009), pp. 199–219; Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, A World in Transition: Art, Science, and Magic in Rudolf II's Prague, in *Maharal. Akdamot; pirke ḥayim, mishnah, hashpaʾah (Overtures. Biography. Doctrine. Influence)*, ed. by Elḥānān Reiner (Jerusalem, 2015), pp. 31–50; Lubomír Konečný, Beket Bukovinská and Ivo Purš, Jewish Prague around the Year 1600, in *Art in the Czech Lands 800–2000*, ed. by Rostislav Švácha and Taťána Petrasová (Řevnice and Prague, 2017), pp. 439–441.

2 Francesco Leone, A "Part" for the "Whole": Reality and Myth of the Menorah from Antiquity to the Present, in *La menorà: Culto, storia e mito*, ed. by Alessandra Di Castro, Francesco Leone and Arnold Nesselrath (Milan, 2017), pp. 30–59 (50). The menorah's history and cultural value have been studied extensively. See for example: *La menorà*, cited in this endnote above; Rachel Hachlili, *The Menorah: Evolving into the Most Important Jewish Symbol* (Leiden and Boston, 2018).

3 It is striking that the letters of this notarikon are particularly emphasized. Here, a Hebrew script, *Ktav Stam*, is used that was usually reserved for the Torah scrolls, the Tefillin, the Mezuzot, and the Five Megillot. The individual letters are adorned with so-called *ketarim,* meaning "crowns." I am grate-

2. Microscopic photograph in backlight of the onyx's black layer (detail of Fig. 1)

> show his grace, strengthen and bless / the above mentioned emperor. May He grant him grace and aw/e over all. May He also give him dominion over nations through / the Holy Angels Hadarniel, Gabriel [and] Nuriel. Amen Selah./ BŠKMLW [May the name of the glory of His Kingship be blessed for all eternity].[4]

Clearly, this object was dedicated to Rudolf II and invokes God and his angels in a prayer to protect the emperor and his people. Another circular Hebrew inscription contains the names of twelve angels.[5] Read counter-clockwise, according to the Hebrew reading direction, and starting from the very top, the following names are given: Uriel,[6] Kahatiel, Paniel,[7] Nuriel,[8] Barkiel,[9] Chaniel,[10] Zuriel,[11] Gabiel, Maroniel, Shaviel,[12] Gavriel, and Dimiel. In the white circular layer of the onyx, the twelve signs of the zodiac are engraved in their proper sequence to be read clockwise starting with Aries. They are each separated by a six-pointed star. The black layer of the stone contains the Hebrew names of the twelve sons of Jacob from whom the eponymous twelve tribes descended. Again, they should be read counter-clockwise beginning with the firstborn: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Joseph, and Benjamin.[13] A Biblical connection between Jacob's sons, the tribes of Israel, and the signs of the zodiac can be inferred from Joseph's dream in which he is circled by eleven stars representing his brothers, and by the

ful to Daniel Birnstiel for pointing this out (correspondence on August 13th, 2020).

4 The translation and the following transcription were done by Daniel Birnstiel to whom I owe thanks for many fruitful discussions.

רודאלפס הקיסר
אגלא (אתה גבור לעולם אדוני)
אל. שדי. יחונן. יאמץ. ויברך
את. הקיסר. הנ"ל (הנזכר לעיל). ויתן. חנו. ומור
או. על. כל. גם. ידבר עמים. תחתיו. עי (על ידי)
המלאכים. הקדשים. הדרניאל
גבריאל. נריאל. אס (אמן סלה)
בשבמלו (ברוך שם כבוד מלכותו לעולם ועד)

For a slightly different reading see: Cohen and Mann (note 1), p. 181, cat. no. 115.

5 Not all of these angels are listed in Gustav Davidson, *A Dictionary of Angels* (New York, 1967). None of them feature among the 72 angels of Shem Hamephorash as cited in Reuchlin. Given the analogies on the amulet, it would be evident to suspect them to be the twelve angels of the zodiac, yet, there are no correspondences. Cf. Ibidem, p. 293 and 342.

6 One of the leading angels in noncanonical lore; ranked variously as a seraph, cherub, regent of the sun, and flame of God. Ibidem, p. 298.

7 The name wards off evil; a guard of the north wind. Ibidem, p. 220.

8 Governor of Virgo in the *Zohar*; the name wards off evil and is frequently found on oriental engraved amulets. Ibidem, p. 209.

9 Ruler of the order of seraphim, governor of the month of February, and one of the 7 archangels. Ibidem, p. 350.

10 One of the 70 childbed amulet angels mentioned in *The Book of the Angel Raziel*; angelic guard of the east wind. Ibidem, p. 84.

11 Zodiacal angel governing Libra. Ibidem, p. 291.

12 One of the 7 angelic guards of the 1st heaven. Ibidem, p. 271.

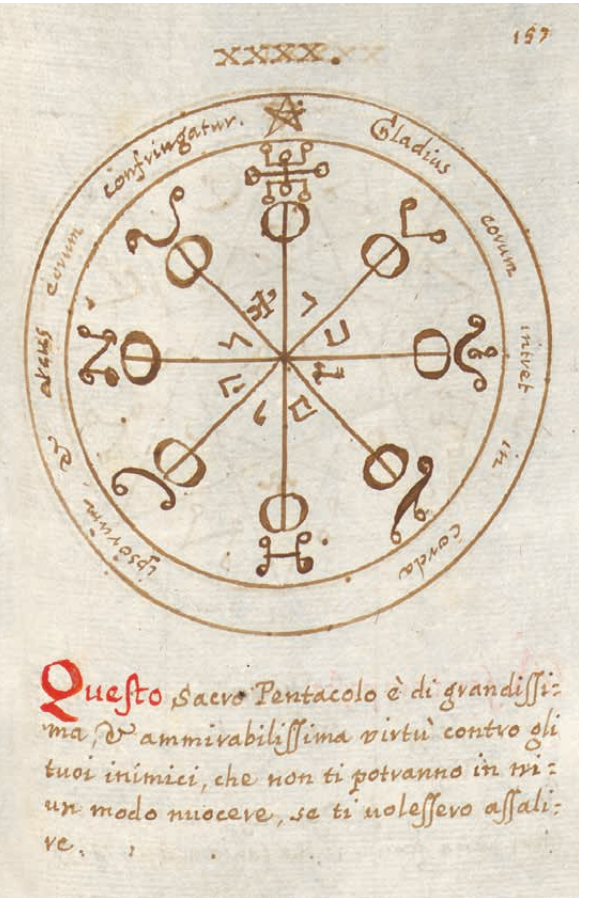
13 This order does not exactly follow any of the orders mentioned in the Bible: Genesis 29:31–35 and 30; Genesis 35:23–26; Genesis 49:1–27; Numeri 26:4–51.

14 Ernst Hentges, Die Magie der Edelsteine, *Zentralblatt für Okkultismus* 26 (1933), pp. 385–392 (387).

15 Günter Stemberger, Die Bedeutung des Tierkreises auf Mosaikfußböden spätantiker Synagogen, in *Studien zum rabbinischen Judentum*, ed. by Günter Stemberger (Stuttgart, 1990), pp. 177–228. The best-preserved example can be found in the Beth Alpha synagogue in Israel. Unlike the zodiac on the amulet, the zodiac in the mosaic runs counterclockwise.

16 A similar visual reference can be found in a silver cup from the early 18th century in the Metropolitan Museum of Art

sun and the moon being his parents Jacob and Leah (Gen. 37:9). Another astrological implication is present in the Blessing of Jacob (Gen. 49:1-27).[14] Visually, this analogy seems to have been picked up in depictions of the zodiac in mosaics in ancient synagogues.[15] In Hebrew literature, this analogy initially appeared in the 13th century in the *Yalkut Shimoni*, found entrance into medieval liturgy but was later dropped.[16] However, no fixed canon could be established and thus the attributions of the zodiacal signs to the Israelite tribes vary from source to source.[17] The names in the amulet's black layer are separated by twelve symbols, which seem to be in direct correspondence with the stars in the white layer. Similar symbols consisting of lines and circles frequently occur on Jewish amulets,[18] are listed in Agrippa von Nettesheim's *De Occulta Philosophia* as characters of the fixed stars,[19] a "celestial script" or "Malachim script",[20] an angelic script that developed out of the Hebrew alphabet,[21] or are part of magical sigils depicted in grimoires like the *Clavicula Salomonis* (Figs. 2 and 3).[22] The row of twelves is finally complemented by the gemstones in the golden enameled frame, which are positioned in line with the stars in the white layer and the symbols just described. In the 1980s, they were identified as: emerald, burnt amethyst, ruby, sapphire, corundum, black onyx, moss agate or heliotrope, hessonite garnet, almandine garnet, agate, turquoise and carnelian.[23] The width of the blue and white enamel fields separating the stones varies and, viewed clockwise, almost seems to be waxing. Consequently, the stones are not perfectly positioned in the axes created by the engravings in


XXXX.
Questo Sacro Pentacolo è di grandissi:
ma, & ammirabilissima virtù contro gli
tuoi inimici, che non ti potranno in ni:
un modo nuocere, se ti voleßevo assali:
re.

3. Sigil to prevent harm in case of an attack, from *Zecorbeni overo calvicula tradotta dall'idioma hebraico all'italiano dal A. Colorno*, Cod. 11262, fol. 80r (Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek)

in New York: https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/193555 (July 7th, 2020). Cf. Mann (note 1), p. 135. See also: Hentges (note 14), p. 387.

17 Erich Bischoff, *Babylonisch-Astrales im Weltbilde des Thalmud und Midrasch* (Leipzig, 1907), pp. 48–59.

18 Joshua Trachtenberg, *Jewish magic and superstition: A study in folk religion* (Philadelphia, 2012), pp. 141.

19 *Agrippa von Nettesheim: Die magischen Werke und weitere Renaissancetraktate*, ed. by Marco Frenschkowski (Wiesbaden, 2008), book II, chapter 52, p. 298.

20 Ibidem, pp. 392. Cf. also UB Leiden, Voss. Chym. 51, fol. 7r as reproduced in: Alena Richterová, Alchemical Manuscripts in the Collections of Rudolf II, in *Alchemy and Rudolf II: Exploring the secrets of nature in central Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries*, ed. by Ivo Purš and Vladimír Karpenko (Prague, 2016), pp. 249–291 (259).

21 Fred Gettings, *Dictionary of Occult, Hermetic and Alchemical Sigils* (London, Boston and Henley, 1981), pp. 131–136.

22 For example: Vienna, ÖNB, Cod. 11262, fols. 59r–81r. Benoît Grévin and Julien Véronèse use the French term "caratères à lunettes" for similar signs consisting of lines and circles and suggest that they originate in ancient manuscripts on magic such as the *Papyri Gracae Magicae*. Cf. Benoît Grévin and Julien Véronèse, Les 'Caractères' magiques au moyen âge (XIIe–XIVe siècle), *Bibliothèque de l'École des chartes* 162 (2004), pp. 305-370, especially pp. 322–323 and 367. See also: Lauri Ockenström, Refined Resemblances. Three Categories of Astromagical Images in Marsilio Ficino's De vita 3.18 and Their Indebtedness to "Abominable" Books, *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft* 9 (2004), pp. 1–32, especially pp. 10–11.

23 Swersky (note 1), p. 33. The identification is according to Gerhard Niedermayr.

4. Reverse of the Amulet of Rudolf II (Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien)

the three-layered onyx and the symmetry is broken.[24] Nevertheless, the overall message is clear: the amulet serves as a microcosmic and transtemporal image of the macrocosm. The menorah in the intaglio's center fits well into this cosmological scheme since, according to Philo of Alexandria and Titus Flavius Josephus, its seven lamps may also represent the seven planets: the sun in the center flanked by Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Mercury, Venus and the Moon.[25]

At closer inspection of the amulet's reverse, the object turns out to be a medallion (Fig. 4). Its golden lid that opens to reveal the reverse of the stone bears a square with 4 x 12 Hebrew letters framing a hexa- and a pentagram. Only three different letters, Jod, He and Daleth, are used alternately in the frame, separated into three entities on each side. Ivo Purš pointed out that these entities contain twelve different permutations of the letters Jod, He, Daleth and He which is too strongly reminiscent of the Tetragrammaton (Jod, He, Waw and He) to be a coincidence.[26] Two more Hes and Daleths are placed in the inner square's corners.[27] The hexagram[28] is surrounded by six Greek crosses

5. Reverse of the Amulet of Rudolf II with opened lid (Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien)

and contains two Latin letters (N) and four rather free adaptions of Hebrew script. The enclosed pentagram is adorned with Latin letters out of which the word IESVS can be formed. Its center is emblazoned with the letter T. Whereas the obverse follows a clear pattern, the reverse perplexes the amulet's beholder. Considering the fact, that the amulet was in the first place a *Kunstkammerstück* not to be worn as a piece of jewelry but to be admired in the imperial collection, this perplexity is perhaps supposed to be transformed into curiosity to encourage the beholder to open the lid. The amulet's status as *Kunstkammerstück* is further

24 As of yet, it remains unclear why the symmetry was willingly destroyed.

25 Cf. Stemberger (note 15), p. 193 and Leone (note 2), p. 32. This is especially the case when the arms are bent and not straight and therefore imitate the planetary orbit. On more meanings of the number seven for the menorah see: Amedeo Spagnoletto, The Menorah. Energy of a Symbol, in *La menorà* (note 2), pp. 60–69.

26 Correspondence on August 18th, 2020.

27 As for the word AGLA on the obverse, the Torah-script, *Ktav Stam*, was used here.

28 On the development and meaning of this symbol, cf. Joaneath Spicer, The Star of David and Jewish Culture in Prague around 1600: Reflected in Drawings of Roelandt Savery and Paulus Vianen, *The Journal of the Walters Art Gallery* 54 (1996), pp. 203–224.

emphasized by the two enameled rings attached to the setting in its vertical axis which did not serve for wearing the amulet on a necklace but for staging it the *Kunstkammer*. In a different context, Paulus Rainer speaks of a "Schaustück" paraphrasing a "Schmuckstück".[29] As presaged by the word IESVS, the inside of the lid is adorned with an enamel miniature of Christ as king and judge of the world surrounded by 20 golden stars and a sea of blue clouds (Fig. 5).[30] Enthroned on a rainbow in the colors blue, gold and green, that stretches over a cherub, Christ holds a sphaira in his left hand and has raised his right hand in a blessing gesture. According to the iconographic tradition, Christ the Judge is flanked by a spray of lilies and a sword, even though the former lacks the white blossom and rather looks like a palm branch here.[31] In contrast to the precision of the amulet's obverse, the artistic quality of the Christ figure is surprisingly low. It therefore becomes likely that the object as it appears today was created in several phases (the intaglio, the frame, and, maybe in a third phase, the lid[32]) and by several hands each having added a new layer of meaning to it. This assumption also seems to be confirmed by the diverging correctness of the script. Whereas the stonecutter was most likely proficient in Hebrew, the goldsmith who worked the lid seems to have been ignorant of it which would explain the false choice of letters for the Tetragrammaton and the free adaptation of Hebrew letters.

The backside of the onyx is polished to the point that it may serve as a mirror. It is also inscribed with six letters positioned at the cardinal points of the circle: LA, AA, LA, GG.[33] Out of this sequence, one of the most powerful magical words and divine names, which was also part of the blessing inscribed on the obverse and which is frequently found on amulets and talismans, can be generated in a twofold reading direction: AGLA,[34] an acronym, or notarikon, of the verse "Atah Gibor Le-olam Adonai," meaning "You are mighty forever Lord."[35]

Another feature about the intaglio is striking which only becomes visible when opening the lid and when viewing the object in back-lighting: A borehole runs diagonally through the translucent stone – a technical masterstroke given the small thickness of the onyx (0,5 cm). As it connects the zodiacal signs of Pisces and Virgo, it has been suggested that it might serve as an "ascending axis."[36] However, these signs have no significance for the emperor's horoscope; Rudolf was born under the sign of Cancer, his ascendant being Capricorn. It is more likely that the onyx was either reused as an intaglio and that it had been drilled through earlier for staging the stone in a different setting or for simply being worn around the neck on a string running through the hole.[37] Interestingly, Agrippa describes a talismanic use of a drilled through stone. By filling the borehole of a chrysolite with donkey hair and by wearing the stone on the left arm, ghosts as

29 Paulus Rainer, Die in Neuzeitlichen Fassungen antiker Prunkkameen, in *Magie der Steine: Die antiken Prunkkameen im Kunsthistorischen Museum*, ed. by Wilfried Seipel (Vienna, 2008), pp. 217–233 (229).

30 Oddly identified as an image of the emperor by Swersky: Swersky (note 1), p. 34. Originally, the clouds on both sides of the Christ figure were covered by blue enamel.

31 *Das Jüngste Gericht: Fresken, Bilder und Gemälde*, ed. by Martin Zlatohlávek, Christian Rätsch and Claudia Müller-Ebeling (Düsseldorf, 2001), p. 218. One of the most famous depictions is the *Last Judgement of the Beaune Altarpiece* by Rogier van der Weyden (1445–1450).

32 Helene Hanzer remarked that the appearance and quality of the gold used for the lid differs from the gold used for the setting.

33 By mistake, the letters were identified as follows: LA, AA, DA, GG, cf. *Prag um 1600* (note 1) and LA, AA, DA, CC, cf. Swersky (note 1), p. 34.

34 Starting from the "A" on the very top counterclockwise and starting from the lower "A" clockwise.

35 It is part of the second verse of the *Amidah*, the central prayer in Jewish liturgy. Cf. Trachtenberg (note 18), p. 261. The practice of notarikon is one of the Kabbalistic methods to rearrange and extract supposedly hidden words and phrases from Biblical verses as introduced to the Christian readership by Johannes Reuchlin (cf. Johannes Reuchlin, *De arte cabalistica libri tres* (Hagenau, 1517), book III. This book was among the Kabbalistic texts edited by Rudolf II's confessor Johannes Pistorius (Johannes Pistorius, *Artis cabalisticæ, hoc est reconditæ theologiæ et philosophiæ scriptorum tomus unus* (Basle, 1587). The emperor granted the privilege for the book's publication.

36 Swersky (note 1), p. 34.

37 Reusing and resetting precious and in particular antique precious stones was quite common. Cf. Fritz Eichler and Ernst Kris, *Die Kameen im Kunsthistorischen Museum* (Vienna, 1927),

6. Hans de Bull, Alchemical Hand Bell of Rudolf II (Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien)

well as melancholic fear and foolishness are said to be repelled.[38] Today, the borehole of the Rudolfine amulet, though, does not seem to have a function anymore – neither substantially nor technically.

Just like the so-called "Alchemical Hand Bell of Rudolf II"[39] (Fig. 6), the amulet was exhibited and reproduced multiple times to illustrate the emperor's occult inclinations and preference for quaint artworks.[40] One might say, it has become a fixed prop in staging the occult myth surrounding Rudolf II. In the inventory of the Rudolfine *Kunstkammer* from 1607/11, one seeks for the amulet in vain, though, as none of the cameos and intaglios from Rudolf II's collection is mentioned in this document. Unlike suggested previously,[41] it is indeed listed in the so-called "Matthias inventory" of 1619 and had obviously been transferred from Prague

p. 146, no. 313; Erika Zwierlein-Diehl, *Antike Gemmen und ihr Nachleben* (Berlin, 2007), p. 212.

38 Frenschkowski (note 19), p. 92, book I, chapter 23.

39 Cf. Corinna Gannon, The Alchemical Hand Bell of Rudolf II: A Touchstone of Art and Alchemy, *Studia Rudolphina* 19 (2019), pp. 80–97.

40 *Prag um 1600* (note 1); *Faszination Edelstein: Aus den Schatzkammern der Welt: Mythos, Kunst, Wissenschaft*, ed. by Sybille Ebert-Schifferer and Klaus J. Brandt, exh. cat. (Darmstadt, 1992), pp. 264, cat. no. 206; *Eros und Mythos: Kunst am Hof Rudolfs II.*, ed. by Sylvia Ferino-Pagden, exh. cat. (Vienna, 1995), p. 75, cat. no. 88; *From Court Jews to the Rothschilds* (note 1), p. 115; *Path of life* (note 1).

41 Swersky (note 1), p. 34.

to Vienna after Rudolf II's death: "An 'anichel' surrounded by 12 'health stones' with characters on the back".[42] The term "anichel" clearly refers to an onyx,[43] the twelve "health stones" indicate the lithotherapeutic use of precious stones and "characters" is a common term to denominate foreign letters and in particular magical signs.[44] At the beginning of the 17th century, the meaning of the dedicatory Hebrew inscription of the amulet linking it to Emperor Rudolf II had already been lost and continued to remain obscure throughout the following centuries. Next, the amulet can be traced in the inventory of the Vienna *Schatzkammer* from 1750 set up for Maria Theresa by Joseph Angelo du France: "A round and deep-cut onyx with the lamp of the Solomonic temple and a Hebrew inscription, an amulet on the reverse, set in gold and enamel and adorned with birthstones."[45] In 1779, all cameos and intaglios were withdrawn from the *Schatzkammer*. 559 pieces were transferred to the *Münz- und Antikenkabinett*,[46] among them must have been the Rudolfine amulet. It was not until the 19th century that the amulet was initially published[47] and that the Hebrew inscription was deciphered by Friedrich von Kenner and Eduard Freiherr von Sacken. This is when the object's myth was fueled: "The seven-lamp of Jerusalem with a Hebrew inscription surrounded by the zodiac, deep cut into onyx. A gift to Emperor Rudolf II by the Israelites of Prague. The setting is adorned with 12 birthstones, inside a depiction of the apocalyptic Christ in enamel."[48] The authors' claim that the amulet was a gift to Rudolf II by the Jewish community was persistently cited in the publications to come even though there are no sources to prove this. However, the reference to the reception of Jewish culture, in particular the Kabbalah, are a key to contextualizing the object.

It is commonly stated that the Jewish community of Prague witnessed a period of relative stability under Rudolf II.[49] According to Giuseppe Veltri, though, it would be exaggerated to speak of a "golden age" since the emperor's favor could be very fragile.[50] In general, the boundaries between the Jewish and the Christian communities seemed to have been unusually fluid since Jews could work as craftsmen, merchants and print Hebrew texts. The astronomer, geographer and chronicler David Gans, for example, was in close contact with Tycho Brahe and Johannes Kepler.[51] Mordechai Maisel, the wealthy money lender and patron of the arts, played an important role in financing the emperor's costly expenses, was granted (and in the end deprived of) several unusual privileges and realized many build-

42 "Ain anichel, rundsumb mit 12 gesundstain, hindenhero mit caracteres," mentioned in Hans Voltelini, Nachlassinventar des Kaisers Matthias von 1619: Urkunden und Regesten aus dem K. u. K. Haus-, Hof und Staats-Archiv in Wien, *JKSAK* 20 (1899), pp. I–CXXIII (Reg. 17408, p. CIV, No. 2896). The translations of the entries in the inventories are my own.

43 Eichler and Kris (note 37), p. 4.

44 In fact, the inventory contains quite a few such objects, for example: "In ainer schachtel: (...) I cirkhel, unden I agata und obenauf I anichell, in gold gefast, daruf caracteres geschnitten", see Voltelini (note 42), p. LXVII or ibidem, "Ain paar gesundarmband mit 28 gesundstein, mit allerlei caracteres gar fleisig zuesamben geschnitten," p. LXVII.

45 "Ein runder diefgeschnittener onyx, worauf der leichter des tempel Salomonis mit haebreischer inschrift, ruckwerts ein amulet, in gold gefast und geschmolzen, dan mit monathsteinern garnirt." Heinrich Zimmermann, Inventar der Schatzkammer von 1750: Inventare, Acten und Regesten aus der Schatzkammer des allerhöchsten Kaiserhauses, *JKSAK* 10 (1889), pp. CCII–CCCXXIV (Reg. 6253, No. 213, p. CCLVIII).

46 Eichler and Kris (note 37), p. 18; Alfred Bernhard-Walcher, Die Geschichte der Sammlung antiker Prunkkameen, in *Magie der Steine. Die antiken Prunkkameen im Kunsthistorischen Museum*, ed. by Wilfried Seipel (Vienna, 2008), pp. 28–53, p. 41.

47 Joseph Arneth, *Das kaiserlich-königliche Münz- und Antiken-Cabinet: Zweite vermehrte Auflage* (Vienna, 1854), p. 106, no. 1261.

48 "Der siebenarmige Leuchter Jerusalems mit hebräischer Inschrift, herum der Zodiacus, in Onyx vertieft geschnitten. Von den Israeliten Prags dem K. Rudolph II. dargebracht. Die Fassung mit den 12 Monatsteinen besetzt, inwendig der apokalyptische Christus in Email." *Die Sammlungen des K. K. Münz- und antiken Cabinetes*, ed. by Friedrich von Kenner and Eduard Freiherr von Sacken (Vienna, 1866), p. 468, no. 208.

49 *Die Juden in Prag*, ed. by Samuel Steinherz (Prague, 1927); Tobias Jakobovits, Die jüdischen Zünfte in Prag, *Jahrbuch der Gesellschaft für Geschichte der Juden in der Cechoslovakischen Republik* 8 (1936), pp. 57–145, in particular pp. 63–68; Spicer (note 28), [with more bibliographic references]; Vít Vlnas, Castle, City, Ghetto: On Prague at the Times of Rudolph II and Maharal, in *Path of life* (note 1), pp. 223–242; Konečný, Bukovinská and Purš (note 1).

50 Giuseppe Veltri, "Ohne Recht und Gerechtigkeit": Kaiser Rudolf und sein Bankier Markus Meyzl, in *An der Schwelle zur Moderne: Juden in der Renaissance*, ed. by Giuseppe Veltri (Leiden, 2003), pp. 233–255 (254).

51 Noah J. Efron, Irenism and Natural Philosophy in Rudolphine Prague: The Case of David Gans, in *Science in Context* 10 (1997), pp. 627–649; Noah J. Efron, Our forefathers did not tell

ing projects in the Jewish ghetto such as a new synagogue, the so-called Maisel Synagogue.[52] One might say he occupied the position of a court Jew even before this office was officially established.[53] Another "unusual" career was that of the Italian Jew Abramo Colorni who sojourned in Prague between 1588 and 1597, advanced to the position of court engineer and moved in Rudolf's inner circle.[54] He provided the emperor with all kinds of curious items, *Kunststücke*, like a "magical" distorting mirror.[55] Furthermore, he created a system of encryption which he published in his *Scotographia* in 1593[56] and conducted alchemical experiments to enhance the development of black powder out of niter that was increasingly requested in times of the Turkish Wars.[57] Colorni thus covered a variety of fields that required arcane knowledge and were considered as particularly "Jewish."[58] Rudolf II's friendliness towards the Jewish community was definitely due to monetary reasons but might have also been spurred by a personal interest in "secret" Jewish wisdom. A firm component of the myth surrounding Rudolf II is his encounter with another famous person equally wrapped in legend: the supposed creator of the Golem, the rabbi Jehuda ben Bezal'el Löw, called "Maharal."[59] No protocol of the meeting in February 1592 survives and thus this encounter between the two most enigmatic figures living in Prague around 1600 has become part of the realm of legend. Two contemporary sources attest the Maharal's audience with the emperor: one by David Gans[60] and another by the rabbi's son-in-law, Isaac Katz.[61] Yet, neither reveals what was spoken. What Katz does give away, though, is that the conversation was about (not necessarily occult) "secrets."[62] Another source, unfortunately not preserved, would have been interesting in this context: Yari Hayyim, a great-great-grandson of the rabbi, noted that the Maharal had prepared an amulet text for the emperor.[63] It is tempting, however, way too bold to see an immediate connection to the amulet discussed in this essay. What this small piece of information does tell is that it is not too far-fetched to consider the theory of the amulet, at the least the onyx, to be a gift by one of the many Jews that surrounded the emperor or that it was inspired by an amulet he had received from the rabbi.

Since the grand exhibition "Prag um 1600" in 1988, the amulet has been labeled as "choshen" and has ever since been published as such.[64] A choshen was a fixed part of the high priest's garment, the ephod, which is minutely described in Exodus 28 (Fig. 7).[65] The embroidered square of the choshen was supposed to hold four rows with three precious stones each. These twelve stones were to be engraved with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. Yet, there is no fixed canon of stones and their attributions to the names vary due to differences in translation of the *Pentateuch* and due to the changing nomenclature of gemstones.[66] The

us'. Jews and Natural Philosophy in Rudolphine Prague, *Endeavour* 26 (2002), pp. 15–18.

52 Giuseppe Veltri, Bankier von Kaisers Gnaden zum Wohle der Prager Juden: Zum 400. Todestag von Markus Meisel, *Kalonymos* 4 (2001), pp. 1–3; Veltri (note 50).

53 Cohen and Mann (note 1), p. 111.

54 Daniel Jütte, *Das Zeitalter des Geheimnisses: Juden, Christen und die Ökonomie des Geheimen (1400–1800)* (Göttingen, 2011), pp. 235–293.

55 Ibidem, p. 243.

56 Abramo Colorno, *Scotographia, ouero, Scienza di scriuere oscuro, facilissima, & sicurissima, per qual si voglia lingua : le cui diuerse inuentioni diuisi in tre libri, seruiranno in più modi, & per cifra, & per contra cifra : le quali, se ben saranno communi a tutti, potranno nondimeno usarsi da ogn'uno, senza pericolo d'essere inteso da altri, che dal proprio corrispondente* (Prague, 1593).

57 Jütte (note 54), pp. 268–290.

58 For more Jewish stereotypes deriving from the Middle Ages see Joshua Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews: The Medieval conception of the Jew and its Relation to Modern Antisemitism* (New Haven, 1943), in particular part two "The Jew as Sorcerer." On Jews' reputation as alchemists see: Raphael Patai, *The Jewish alchemists: A history and source book* (Princeton N.J., 1995).

59 See for example: Chaim Bloch, *Der Prager Golem von seiner 'Geburt' bis zu seinem 'Tod'* (Vienna, 1919); Friedrich Thieberger, *The great Rabbi Loew of Prague: His life and work and the legend of the Golem. With extracts of his writings and a collection of the old legends* (London, 1955); Byron L. Sherwin, *Mystical Theology and Social Dissent: The Life and Works of Judah Loew of Prague* (Cary, 2006).

60 David Gans, *Tzemach David* (Prague, 1592), 1:31a.

61 In length quoted in Bloch (note 59), pp. 109.

62 Sherwin (note 59), p. 15; Veltri (note 50), p. 240.

63 Sherwin (note 59), p. 15.

64 *Prag um 1600* (note 1).

65 Despite this precise Biblical account, the true appearance of this apparel is debated. Cf. Karl Elliger, Ephod und Choschen: Ein Beitrag zur Entwicklungsgeschichte des hohepriesterlichen Ornats, *Vetus Testamentum* 8 (1958), pp. 19–35.

66 Heinrich Quiring, Die Edelsteine im Amtsschild des jüdischen Hohenpriesters und die Herkunft ihrer Namen,

7. Reconstruction of a Choshen, from Wolfgang Zwickel, Edelsteine in der Bibel (Mainz, 2002), p. 33, fig. 32

choshen in its entirety was subject to magical speculations as it was said to serve as a pouch for the so-called *Urim* and *Thummin* (to be translated as "light and perfection"), artefacts that somehow served to make God's will known to the people in an oracular process. The true nature of the *Urim* and *Thummin* has been part of a long scholarly debate and until today it is not undisputed what they actually were and how – if at all – they were stored in the breastplate.[67] Eventually, these mythical artefacts were separated from the Biblical source and found their way into magical and in particular Rosicrucian tracts. Interestingly, in some of these texts, the *Urim* and *Thummin* were to be made from *Electrum*, the same material the "Alchemical Hand Bell" is said to be composed of.[68]

Due to the enumeration of twelve different gemstones, the Biblical description of the choshen became a standard reference in medieval and early modern lapidaries. Lithotherapy was considered the be a heathen practice, yet, the Biblical passages mentioning gemstones were used as a pretext to circumnavigate Christian doubts concerning the implementation of

Sudhoffs Archiv für Geschichte der Medizin und der Naturwissenschaften 38 (1954), pp. 193–213; Wolfgang Zwickel, Die Edelsteine im Brustschild des Hohenpriesters und beim himmlischen Jerusalem, in *Edelsteine in der Bibel*, ed. by Wolfgang Zwickel (Mainz, 2002), pp. 50–70.

67 To name just a few publications on this issue: *Grosses vollständiges Universal-Lexicon aller Wissenschaften und Künste. Ein und Funfzigster Band, Vri-Uz.*, ed. by Johann Heinrich Zedler (Leipzig and Halle, 1747), column 15–64; Johann Joachim Bellermann, *Die Urim und Thummim: Die ältesten Gemmen* (Berlin, 1824); Cornelis van Dam, *The Urim and Thummin: A means of revelation in Ancient Israel* (Winona Lake, Ind., 1997); Dolores G. Kamrada, Urim and Thummin, in *Cultural memory in Biblical exegesis*, ed. by Pernille Carstens, Trine Hasselbalch and Niels Peter Lemche (Piscataway, NJ, 2012), pp. 267–289.

68 Hereward Tilton, The Urim and Thummim and the Origins of the Gold- und Rosenkreuz, in *Octagon: The quest for wholeness*, ed. by Hans Thomas Hakl (Gaggenau, 2016), pp. 35–70.

stones in medicine.[69] Likewise, the title page of the 1539 edition of Marbod's *Liber De Lapidibus* depicts a high priest with an oversized breastplate with the twelve gemstones as well as the names of the twelve tribes (Fig. 8). At the court of Rudolf II, the lapidary tradition reached a new level. This was fostered by the emperor's personal interest in collecting, classifying and ordering artworks made from precious stones (cameos, intaglios, *commessi di pietre dure*, as well as paintings on stone) and by Bohemia's rich resources which Rudolf II systematically and exclusively exploited.[70] The large occurrence of gems prompted the above mentioned David Gans to describe the country as an earthly paradise: "(...) diamonds, amethysts, garnets – abound in this land which indeed is lacking in no conceivable good."[71] Anselm de Boodt's mineralogical treatise and lapidary *Gemmarum et Lapidum Historia* (1609) developed out of this particular focus in Rudolf II's collection which he was allowed to consult for his studies.[72] In his dedication to the emperor, De Boodt mentions the high priest's choshen and its twelve gemstones whose splendor is to inspire the community during service.[73] The stones' splendor, he continues, which is a manifestation of the divine light, may also serve to increase a ruler's, i.e. Rudolf II's, dignity. This subtle analogy between the high priest and the ruler in De Boodt's dedication seems to be materialized in the amulet. It plays on the priestly artefact, but in the first place serves as an item to enhance its bearer's glory. It is open to debate whether a Jewish donor would have established a parallel between the high priest and a Christian emperor. Yet, this would again lend credence to the suggestion that the setting, which is a rather free adaptation of what was conceived to be a choshen, was indeed added at a later point.

Exodus 28, however, is not the only passage in the Bible that mentions twelve gemstones and/or the twelve tribes. In Ezekiel's vision of Jerusalem, the twelve gates bear the names of the twelve tribes (Ezek. 48: 31–34). This is again picked up in the Book of Revelation (Rev. 21: 12). Also, the walls surrounding the Heavenly Jerusalem are said to be adorned with twelve gemstones (Rev. 21: 19–20).[74] It is likely that the Rudolfine amulet refers to the passages in the Old and New Testament at the same time – the present and future so to speak. This reference to the Book of Revelation is strengthened by the depiction of the apocalyptic Christ in the amulet's lid. In fact, the amulet would not be the first imperial piece of jewelry to simultaneously play on both passages. The imperial crown of the Holy Roman Empire (10th century) is adorned with four stone-plates. The front and the back plates are each set with twelve stones and considered to be a reference to the high priest's choshen as well as to the gates of the Heavenly Jerusalem.[75]

A sense of apocalypticism was omnipresent towards the turn of the century and might have contributed to the choice of the image in the lid. The year 1600 was expected to bring a world-changing event which was conceived to be foreshadowed in Biblical numerical exegeses and by several unusual natural and astronomical occurrences such as the increasing number of monstrous births, storms, fires and diseases, the sighting of comets, falling stars, the appearance of the new star in the constellation of Cassiopeia in 1572, or the expected grand conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn

69 On the Christian symbolism of gemstones see: Christel Meier-Staubach, *Gemma spiritalis: Methode und Gebrauch der Edelsteinallegorese vom frühen Christentum bis ins 18. Jahrhundert* (Munich, 1977).

70 Walther Fischer, Kaiser Rudolf II. Mineraliensammler und Mäzen der Edelsteinbearbeitung, *Der Aufschluss* 22 (1971), pp. 1–36; Johanna Beate Lohff, *Malerei auf Stein: Antonio Tempestas Bilder auf Stein im Kontext der Kunst- und Naturtheorie seiner Zeit* (Munich, 2015), pp. 66–69.

71 André Neher and David Maisel, *Jewish thought and the scientific revolution of the sixteenth century: David Gans (1541–1613) and his times* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 21.

72 Anselmus de Boodt, *Gemmarum et Lapidum Historia* (Prague, 1609).

73 Ibidem, p. 5. See also: Ivo Purš, Anselmus Boetius de Boodt, Pansophie und Alchemie, *Acta Comeniana* 18 (2004), pp. 43–90, here: p. 56 and Ivo Purš, Anselmus Boetius de Boodt: Physician, Mineralogist and Alchemist, in *Alchemy and Rudolf II* (note 20), pp. 535–579 (545–549).

74 Meier-Staubach (note 69), pp. 83–89; Beate Matuschek, Edelsteine des himmlischen Jerusalems, in *Magische Kräfte edler Steine,* ed. by Alfons Biermann, exh. cat. (Cologne, 1990), pp. 47–54; Otto Böcher, Das himmlische Jerusalem, in *Edelsteine in der Bibel*, ed. by Wolfgang Zwickel (Mainz, 2002), pp. 71–77.

75 Otto Böcher, *Das himmlische Jerusalem und seine Wirkungsgeschichte in der Kunst unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des Gebrauchs der Edelsteine* (Waltrop, 2004), p. 40.

8. Title page from Marbodaei Galli, De gemmarum lapidumque pretiosorum formis, naturis atque viribus (Cologne, 1539)

in the fiery trigon.[76] Rudolf's reign fell exactly into this period of suspense and it seems only natural that hopes were projected onto this emperor. This is for example attested by an engraving by Matthäus Greuter (Fig. 9). As Günther Irmscher has worked out, this "visual prophecy" presents Rudolf II as the initiator of a *novum imperium* and long-awaited *End-* and *Friedenskaiser*.[77] One of the three medallions included in this engraving shows God the Father enthroned on a rainbow and surrounded by an aureole of light – not unlike the Christ figure in the amulet. The Jewish as well as the Christian apocalyptic are in essence about "a disclosure of the divine mysteries"[78] culminating in a theophany – the sighting of God.[79] In the Book of Revelation (4:3), the vision of God is described as follows: "And he who sat there appeared like jasper and carnelian, and round the throne was a rainbow that looked like an emerald."[80] The depiction of Christ enthroned on a colorful arch in the amulet's lid representing and embodying God together with the twelve gemstones in the setting seem to reenact this apocalyptic theophany which is only awarded to the possessor of the amulet (i.e. Rudolf II). By opening the secret lid, he is exclusively granted a glimpse of the divine mysteries. With its glorifying inscription and the hidden reference to the Last Judgement, the amulet thus derives from a general anticipation of the world's end around 1600, yet, with a more practical function than Greuter's engraving: it is a personal talisman presented to the person in whom all hopes lie – an active interference in times of perceived helplessness and imminent doom. This quality is emphasized by the word AGLA, the menorah, the hexagram (*Magen David*) and the allusion to the Tetragrammaton which are all elements

76 Margaret Aston, The Fiery Trigon Conjunction: An Elizabethan Astrological Prediction, *Isis* 61 (1970), pp. 158–187; Deborah E. Harkness, *John Dee's Conversations with Angels: Cabala, Alchemy, and the End of Nature* (Cambridge, 1999), p. 134; Günter Irmscher, Sine Novum Imperium Instituesque Rudolphe Secunde: Zu einem Stich Matthäus Greuters nach Nikolaus Reimers, *Jahrbuch der Staatlichen Kunstsammlungen in Baden-Würtemberg* 30 (1993), pp. 24–44; Robin Bruce Barnes, *Prophecy and gnosis: Apocalypticism in the wake of the Lutheran Reformation* (Stanford, 1988); Robin Bruce Barnes, Der herabstürzende Himmel: Kosmos und Apokalypse unter Luthers Erben, in *Jahrhundertwenden. Endzeit- und Zukunftsvorstellungen vom 15. bis zum 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. by Manfred Jakubowski-Tiessen (Göttingen, 1999), pp. 129–145; Ernst Koch, Bibelauslegung und Endzeiterwartung in der Frühen Neuzeit, in *Endzeitvorstellungen*, ed. by Barbara Haupt (Düsseldorf, 2001), pp. 313–329.

77 Irmscher (note 76), p. 34. On the concept of the *Endkaiser* cf. Hannes Möhring, *Der Weltkaiser der Endzeit: Entstehung, Wandel und Wirkung einer tausendjährigen Weissagung* (Stuttgart, 2000).

78 Christopher Rowland, *The open heaven: A study of apocalyptic in Judaism and early Christianity* (London, 1982), p. 11.

79 Ibidem, pp. 74–94. For a list of Jewish and Christian apocalyptic writings see ibidem, p. 15.

80 This description borrows from Old Testament visions like Ezekiel 1 and Daniel 7–12. On the allegorical meaning of the stones mentioned here see Meier-Staubach (note 69), pp. 118–121.

CAROLVS IN MEDIO INQVE OCCASVM VERTIT AB ORTV FINE NOVVM IMPERIVM INSTITVENSQVE RVDOLPHE SECVNDE
PR INCIPIO AVGVSTVS LOCAT IMPERIVM ORBIS VTRIN QVE
DIVO RVDOLPHO
SECVNDO IMP AVG

9. Matthäus Greuter, Visual prophecy on Rudolf II, 1594 (Kunstsammlungen der Veste Coburg)

frequently found on talismans.[81] It now seems like the object's exclusive labeling as "choshen" needs to be reconsidered – because of the dual allusion to the Old and the New Testament and because of its materiality. The high priest's choshen is always defined as a square piece of cloth and never as a round piece of jewelry. Furthermore, Exodus describes the twelve stones to be inscribed with the names of the twelve tribes. Here, the names are cut into the onyx and are not even explicitly associated to the individual stones in the frame but rather, as stated above, to the stars and celestial characters. It would therefore seem more appropriate to refer to this unique piece of jewelry simply as "amulet" or as "talisman."[82]

81 Marina Caffiero, The Magic of the Menorah in the Modern Era: From Object of Devotion to the Kabbalah, in *La menorà* (note 2), pp. 92–103.

82 In fact, it would be even more appropriate to speak of "talisman." In general, one agrees that the term "amulet" refers to a natural item like a plant or a stone. A "talisman" is also made of a natural material, yet reworked, added with characters or images to augment inherent occult powers. Cf. Nicolas Weill-Parot, *Les "images astrologiques" au Moyen Age et à la Renaissance: Spéculations intellectuelles et pratiques magiques (XIIe-XVe siècle)* (Paris and Geneva, 2002), p. 102; Benedek Láng, *Unlocked books: Manuscripts of learned magic in the medieval libraries of Central Europe* (University Park, 2008), p. 81; Peter Forshaw, Magical Material & Material Survivals: Amulets, Talismans, and

Talismans have a long tradition in cultural history. A talisman is usually a piece of stone or metal sympathetic to a certain planet, star or constellation and engraved with corresponding characters or images at an astrologically determined moment when the connection to the celestial sphere is most powerful.The belief in this practice is based on the Neoplatonic conception of a cosmological interconnectedness in which "similar" things may affect each other.[83] It was mainly thanks to the Marsilio Ficino that ancient Egyptian, Arabic and Greek theories of magic were syncretized, aligned with medieval Christian beliefs and popularized in the western world. *His De vita libri tres* (in particular book III, *De vita coelestis comparanda*) published in 1489 was a key to disseminating the theory and practice of the talismanic art.[84] Ficino heavily relied on the *Picatrix*, a book of Arabic origin on magic, astrology and talismans, of which Rudolf II evidently owned a copy.[85] In the course of the 16th century, Ficinian ideas were adopted by Agrippa von Nettesheim (particularly book II of his *De occulta philosophia*, chapters 22, 36–52)[86] and Paracelsus (for example in the *Liber di Imaginibus*[87] or the Pseudo-Paracelsian *De Sigillis Planetarum*).[88] Both authors describe various complex images that are supposed to be engraved into metals or precious stones which are sympathetic to a certain planet, star, or constellation. Due to the Biblical description of the engraved gems on the high priest's choshen, it is not surprising that the invention of the art of gem cutting and their endowment with an astrological efficacy were ascribed to the Israelites. Konrad von Megenberg, for example, the author of the *Book of Nature* (ca. 1349–1350), identifies the biblical craftsmen Bezalel and Oholiab as the producers of the choshen and the inventors of this art.[89] Camillo Leonardi, the author of the *Speculum lapidum* (1502), elaborates on this and declares the Israelites to have invented the (talismanic) arts in general.[90] In reality, though, "like many other Christian ideas about the Jews," as Joshua Trachtenberg points out, "their reputation as experts in the magic virtues of gems was far wide of the mark."[91] The engraved gems on the choshen in fact have a very profane origin: They derive from stamp sigils that were produced as early as 800 B.C. for high officials and usually contained the name of the province they were used in to mark the sphere of influence of the sigil's bearer.[92] Nevertheless, the production and use of amulets was widespread in Jewish culture, even though they

Mirrors in Early Modern Europe, in *The Materiality of Magic*, ed. by Dietrich Boschung and Jan N. Bremmer (Paderborn, 2015), pp. 357–378 (358).

83 *Picatrix: Das Ziel des Weisen von Pseudo-Magriti*, ed. by Hellmut Ritter and Martin Plessner (London, 1962), p. xxiii.

84 *Marsilio Ficino: Three Books on Life. A Critical Edition and Translation with Introduction and Notes*, ed. by Carol V. Kaske and John R. Clark (Binghampton and New York, 1989); Lauri Ockenström, Refined Resemblances: Three Categories of Astromagical Images in Marsilio Ficino's De vita 3.18 and Their Indebtedness to "Abominable Books," in *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft* 9, June (2014), pp. 1–32; Susanne Beiweis, Der Talisman: Das Brechen bestehender Analogien. Zur Rezeption antiker Magie bei Marsilio Ficino, *Frühneuzeit-Info* 43 (2013), pp. 43–50; Susanne Beiweis, "Naturam ars imitatur": Magical images within Marsilio Ficino's De vita libri tres, *Verbum Analecta Neolatina* 19 (2018), pp. 155–180.

85 Richterová (note 20), p. 250. On the *Picatrix* see the introduction to Ritter and Plessner (note 83).

86 Frenschkowski (note 19), pp. 274–287; Ockenström (note 84), p. 7.

87 *Husersche Quartausgabe: Medizinische und philosophische Schriften. Vol. 9,* ed. by *Johannes Huser* (Basle, 1591), pp. 392–393.

88 Book VII of the so-called *Archidoxis magicae*, in *Husersche Quartausgabe: Medizinische und philosophische Schriften. Vol. 10,* ed. by Johannes Huser (Basle, 1590), Appendix, pp. 131–138.

89 *Das Buch der Natur: Konrad von Megenberg*, ed. by Franz Pfeiffer (Stuttgart, 1861), p. 431.

90 Maurice Saß, Gemalte Korallenamulette: Zur Vorstellung eigenwirksamer Bilder bei Piero della Francesca, Andrea Mantegna und Camillo Leonardi, *Kunsttexte* 1 (2012), pp. 1–53, p. 15. Lodovico Dolce popularized the Speculum by translating it into Italian (*Libri delle gemme*, 1564). See also: Carla Di Bellis, Astri, gemme e arti medico-magiche nello 'Speculum Lapidum' di Camillo Leonardi, in *Il mago, il cosmo, il teatro degli astri: Saggi sulla letteratura esoterica del rinascimento*, ed. by Gianfranco Formichetti (Rome, 1985), pp. 67–114; Maurice Saß, *Physiologien der Bilder: Naturmagische Felder frühneuzeitlichen Verstehens von Kunst* (Berlin, 2016), pp. 249–254; Nicolas Weill-Parot, Making a New Stone: The Magical Powers of Carved Stones from Albert the Great to Camillo Leonardi, in *Steinformen: Materialität, Qualität, Imitation*, ed. by Isabella Augart, Maurice Saß and Iris Wenderholm (Berlin and Boston, 2019), pp. 255–266.

91 Trachtenberg (note 18), p. 136.

92 Zwickel (note 66). On the high priest's choshen, therefore, all tribes were symbolically united.

93 Theodore Schrire, *Hebrew Magic Amulets: Their Decipherment and Interpretation* (New York, 1982), pp. 17–19. On Hebrew amulets see also: Trachtenberg (note 18), pp. 132–152.

were usually written on paper or engraved into metal and not on (precious) stones. Given this fundamental difference in materiality, it is striking that the elements Theodore Schrire names for a "typical Hebrew amulet"[93] can all be identified in the Rudolfine amulet which is evidently a cut stone: an invocation (Rudolf the Emperor!), a divine name (AGLA), angelic names (Hadarniel, Gabriel and Nuriel), the purpose of the amulet (protection of the emperor and his people), the concluding words "Amen" and "Selah," as well as a figure, most frequently a penta- or hexagram.[94] Such amulets were not only used by Jews but, because of the supposed magical knowledge and healing powers ascribed to this folk and their language, also highly requested by Christians. In the many "christianized" versions of Hebrew amulets, elements of both cultures naturally mingle.[95] The Rudolfine amulet must also be seen in this context of Christian appropriation and modification of Jewish ideas – in particular with regards to Jewish mysticism, the Kabbalah.

In the late 15th and early 16th century, Kabbalistic ideas were made available for a Christian readership by the writings of Pico della Mirandola and Johannes Reuchlin. It must be stressed, however, that this adaptation was rather a reformulation through a Christian lens. Both, Della Mirandola and Reuchlin "christianized" the Kabbalah in order approximate Judaism and Christianity, however, not without trying to "prove" the superiority of the latter.[96] Therefore, as Karen de Léon-Jones states, "few of the Christian thinkers who delved into the teachings of the Kabbalah could really be labelled Kabbalists."[97] Such "Kabbalistic" ideas particularly found entrance into magical and alchemical tracts, as for example into the writings of Paracelsus, John Dee and Heinrich Khunrath.[98] What these authors hoped to attain from whatever they conceived as Kabbalah was universal knowledge by supernatural revelation. The fascination with the Kabbalistic "word magic", the hermeneutic techniques based on the manipulation of letters, led to creative adaptions of the Hebrew alphabet. This extensive and almost abusive use of Hebrew letters as a means of mystification can be observed in several artworks produced at the court of Rudolf II. The iron clapper of the "Alchemical Hand Bell," for example, is engraved with a spiraling Hebrew inscription which does not seem to have a substantive significance.[99] The same is true for the so-called "Horoscope of Rudolf II", a watercolor miniature by an artist from the Hoefnagel circle (Fig. 10).[100] Here, Hebrew letters replace the signs of the zodiac to mark the cusps. Even though the astrological content is destroyed, together with the angels depicted and the angelic names on the four scrolls, an enigmatic image full of supposed Kabbalistic references is created. The amulet's reverse definitely fits into this free and one might even say careless handling of "Kabbalah."

What is striking in all these artworks is the stark contrast between a logical system and a puzzling enigma. Whereas the amulet's obverse is minutely worked out to make all elements fit into the pattern of twelves, the reverse and the image inside the lid break with this symbolism and leave the beholder confused. Maybe what Christine Tauber has called "programmatische Programmlosigkeit", a deliberate lack of program, which she attested for the cryptic Mannerist visual program in the Grand Galerie in Fontainebleau,[101] can

94 Ibidem, pp. 140.

95 In the collection of the Jewish Museum in London: https://jewishmuseum.org.uk/collections/objects/JM%20618 (20 July 2020, and in the *Münzkabinett* of the *Germanisches Nationalmuseum* in Nuremberg there is a Hebrew-Christian brass amulet that depicts a haloed Christ-head in a pentagon on the reverse (Med 6018) – a rather unusual element given the Jewish prohibition of images – whereas the obverse has a rather "conventional" Hebrew inscription with the angelic names and the 12-letter name in a 12-box square. Cf. Schrire (note 93), pp. 71 and 165 and plates 42/43; Trachtenberg (note 58), p. 61.

96 Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggemann, Einleitung: Johannes Reuchlin und die Anfänge der christlichen Kabbala, in *Christliche Kabbala*, ed. by. Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggemann (Ostfildern, 2003), pp. 9–48.

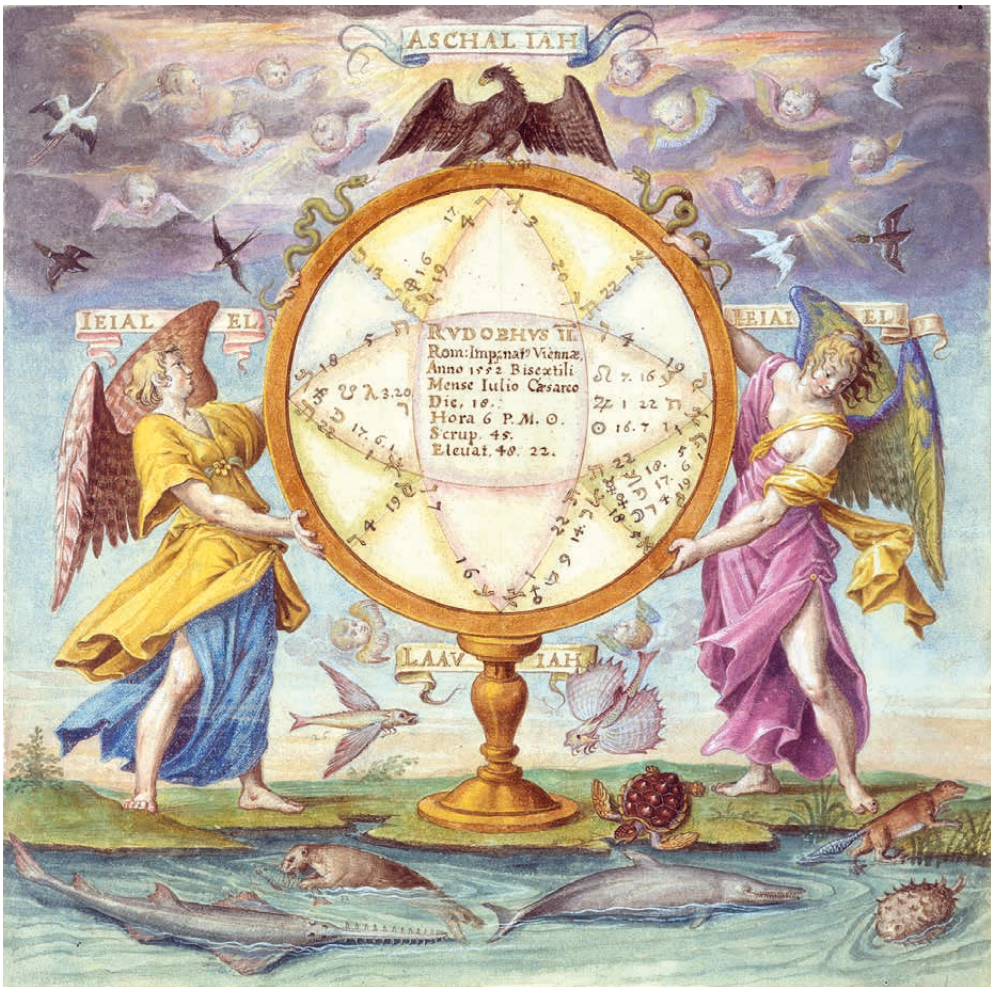
97 Karen de Léon-Jones, John Dee and the Kabbalah, in *John Dee: Interdisciplinary Studies in English Renaissance Thought. International Archives of the History of Ideas*, ed. by Stephen Clucas (Dordrecht, 2006), pp. 143–158 (148).

98 Trachtenberg (note 58), pp. 76–87; Harkness (note 76), chapter 5; Léon-Jones (note 97); Peter Forshaw, Cabala Chymica or Chemia Cabalistica: Early Modern Alchemists and Cabala, *Ambix* 60 (2013), pp. 361–389.

99 Gannon (note 39), p. 83.

100 Vienna, ÖNB, Cod. Min. 31. I am dedicating a chapter on this image in my dissertation.

101 Christine Tauber, *Manierismus und Herrschaftspraxis: Die Kunst der Politik und die Kunstpolitik am Hof François Ier* (Berlin, 2009), p. 201.



10. Hoefnagel-Circle, Horoscope of Rudolf II, from Cod. Min. 31, fol. 1 (Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek)

be applied to the amulet on a smaller scale. According to Tauber, it is the sovereign, in this case Francis I, who is the only person to hold the key to deciphering the enigmatic artworks in his collection. By intentionally "hermeticizing" the imagery, the beholder becomes overwhelmed and is forced into an inferior and humble position. The king alone may lift the veil if he pleases. Tauber's observations are fruitful for reconsidering objects like the amulet that block a straightforward reading and interpretation. Certainly, the collection of intaglios and cameos were approached differently, and their reception cannot be equated with the well-staged circuit in the gallery of Fontainebleau. Nevertheless, if we imagine a conversation in the Rudolfine *Kunstkammer* between the emperor and a (diplomatic) visitor, it is not unlikely that Rudolf II took a similar stance as Francis I and presented himself as the only person to be able to uncover the secrets contained in his collectibles claiming to have superior knowledge.[102] In such a conversation, the amulet may have served as an intellectual riddle to test the visitor's level of education. Already the astonishingly precise Hebrew inscription must have embarrassed a Christian beholder whereas the emperor was most certainly familiar with its meaning. The challenge is continued by the correct attribution of the rows of twelves which is complicated by the displaced axes of the stones. Turned around, the riddle is enhanced by the amulet's performative quality. Only when opening the lid, another unexpected layer of hidden meaning is uncov-

ered with the apocalyptic figure. The polished reverse of the onyx adds a moment of *nosce te ipsum*. Examining the amulet not only visually but also haptically may therefore be equated with a playful challenge to delve into speculations about occult wisdom going hand in hand with an affirmation of the emperor's superiority.

The quest for universal and even divine knowledge and wisdom may be considered as Rudolf's declared goal and summarized under the heading "pansophy." Against this backdrop, the multifaceted investigation into the natural world must be understood in which practices like alchemy, astrology and magic played an important role. Angel magic, as has become evident when examining the function of the so called "Alchemical Hand Bell", was definitely an issue at the Rudolfine court aspiring to find a path to divine wisdom. For the bell's Paracelsian textual background and John Dee's angel magic, Pseudo-Solomonic grimoires have been suggested to be the common ground and mutual root in intellectual history.[103] The amulet also fits into this cultural context as will be elaborated in the following and final section of this essay.

Dee's angelic conversations, the séances he conducted together with his scryer Edward Kelley, were well-staged ritual practices in which a number of objects were employed.[104] Thanks to Dee's meticulous documentation, we are well-informed about the artefacts used.[105] A drawing in MS 3188 in the British Library gives an idea of how a showstone, the "holy table" and the "sigillum dei" were supposed to be arranged (Fig. 11).[106] The showstones, of which Dee owned at least three different types, formed the heart of the angelic conversations. Besides a crystal globe, he possessed a stone in a frame, as well as a stone supposedly delivered to him by angels in which the celestial beings would appear. The latter was the most "sacred" stone and Dee had it set in gold to wear it as a pendant around his neck.[107] He even mentioned it to Rudolf II during his famous audience on September 3rd, 1584: "yea, they [the angels] have brought me a Stone of that value, that no earthly Kingdom is of worthinesse to be compared to the vertue or dignity thereof."[108] Calling to mind the reflecting and therefore catoptromantic quality of the polished reverse of Rudolf's amulet stone and the inscription of twelve angelic names, it does not seem unlikely that the amulet was also conceived as an allusion to a magical artifact to communicate with celestial beings. The decoration of the other objects Dee used during his seánces were minutely worked out. In the same manuscript as mentioned above, there is a detailed drawing of the sigillum Dee created according to angelic instructions (Fig. 12).[109] This plate, which Clucas calls "the most significant link between Dee's heptarchical art and the practices of Pseudo-Solomonic theurgy",[110] is supposed to be made of wax and have a diameter

102 This idea came up in a very fruitful discussion following my online lecture on this topic on June 29th, 2020 (Virtuelle Kunstgespräche der Universität Hamburg).

103 Gannon (note 39), pp. 91–93; Stephen Clucas, John Dee's Angelic Conversations and the Ars Notoria, in *John Dee: Interdisciplinary Studies in English Renaissance Thought. International Archives of the History of Ideas*, ed. by Stephen Clucas (Dordrecht, 2006), pp. 231–273.

104 Deborah E. Harkness, Shows in the Showstone: A Theater of Alchemy and Apocalypse in the Angel Conversations of John Dee (1527–1608/9), *Renaissance Quarterly* 49 (1996), pp. 707–737; Harkness (note 76). On the objects in particular see: Christopher Whitby, *John Dee's actions with spirits. Vol. 1* (New York, 1988), pp. 118–156; Silke Ackermann and Louise Devoy, 'The Lord of the smoking mirror': Objects associated with John Dee in the British Museum, *Studies in the History and Philosophy of Science* 43 (2012), pp. 539–549.

105 The most important manuscript is MS Sloane 3191 in the British Library. On Dee's angel conversations see also: *A true and faithful relation of what passed for many years between Dr. John Dee and some spirits*, ed. by Meric Casaubon (London, 1659); *The private diary of Dr. John Dee and the catalogue of his library of manuscripts, from the original manuscripts in the Ashmolean museum at Oxford, and Trinity college library*, ed. by James Orchard Halliwell (Cambridge and London, 1842); *The Diaries of John Dee*, ed. by Edward Fenton (Charlbury, 2000); *Dr John Dee's spiritual diary (1583–1608): Being completely new & reset edition of "A true & faithful relation of what passed for many yeers between Dr. John Dee and some spirits"; being British Library Cotton Appendix MS XLVI, parts I & II out of the original copy, written with Dr. Dee's own hand, kept in the library of Sir Thomas Cotton, knight baronet; with additional material from Bodleian Ashmole MS 1790,* ed. by Stephen Skinner (Singapore, 2011).

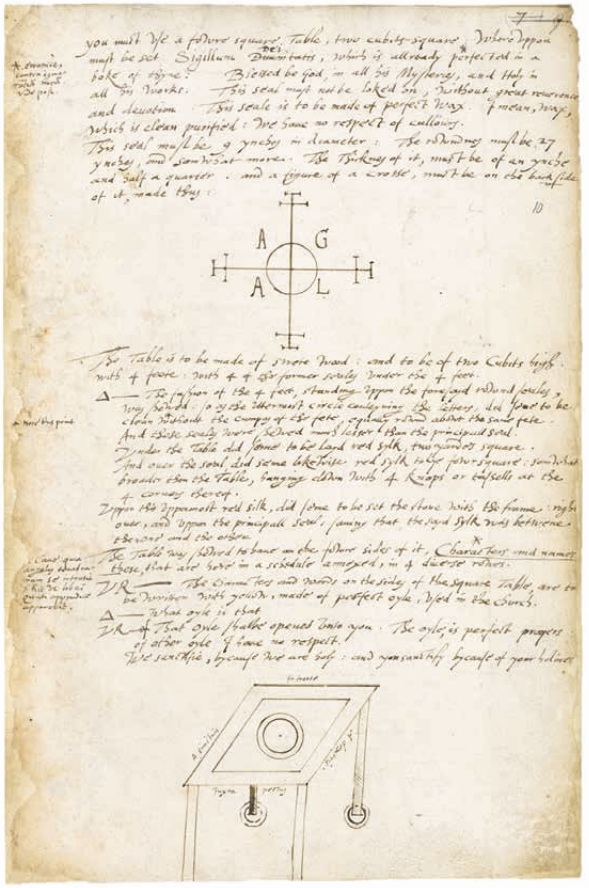
106 London, British Library, MS 3188, fol. 10r. Cf. Ackermann and Devoy (note 104).

107 Whitby (note 104), pp. 137–141; Harkness (note 76), pp. 29–31.

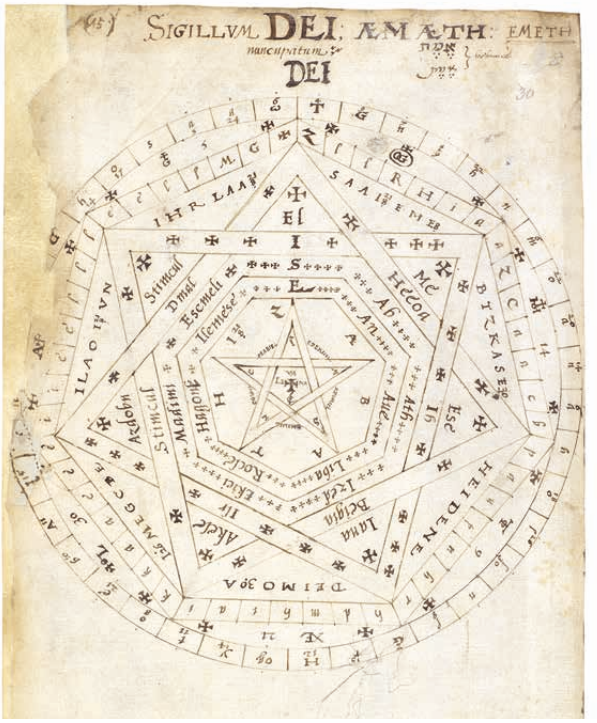
108 Casaubon (note 105), p. 231.

109 London, British Library, MS 3188, fol. 30r.

110 Clucas (note 103), p. 245.

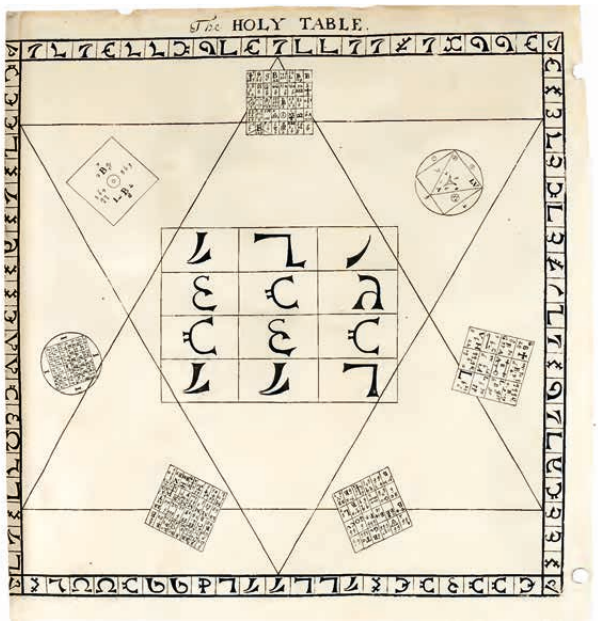


11. John Dee's staging of magical artefacts from MS 3188, fol. 10r (London, British Library)



12. John Dee's Sigillum Dei, from MS 3188, fol. 30r (London, British Library)

of 9 inches (22,86 cm). It is adorned with a complex figure that is dominated by a heptagram enclosing a pentagram. Without going into detail of the complex system of Dee's cosmology, the names of angels and Greek crosses are the dominating elements in this figure. Indeed, such figures abound in Pseudo-Solomonic grimoires like the *Clavicula Salomonis* and related manuscripts. They contain a welter of combinations of hepta-, hexa- and pentagrams, angelic and divine names, many of which are written in Hebrew.[111] The sigil's reverse shows something familiar: the letters AGLA arranged around a central cross.[112] The square-shaped "holy table" on which the sigil was to be placed was adorned with a hexagram with a magical square in its center and seven talismanic figures, the so-called "Ensigns of Creation" (Fig. 13).[113] Instead of numbers, the square contains letters from Dee's angelic alphabet which can also be discerned in the table's frame, 21 on each side.[114] In addition, Dee himself became part of the magical enactment. Besides a rod[115] and a magical ring,[116] he wore a triangular breastplate, the so-called "lamine," which he associated with the high priestly *Urim* and *Thummin*.[117] With these objects at hand, many similarities with the Rudolfine amulet become evident: not only the overall context of invoking celestial beings, but also the prominent staging of a (magical) stone, the composition of a penta- and hexagram, the use of (Hebrew) script, the abundance of Greek crosses,[118] and last but not least the emphasis on the word AGLA. It is not the intention to present Dee's artefacts as the immediate source for the amulet's decoration. Rather, Dee's magical objects, the amulet as well as the "Alchemical Hand Bell", are symptoms of a common mindset based on a Pseudo-Salomonic tradition to implement angel magic and to adopt methods and symbols loosely referring back to Kabbalah in order gain insight into and control over the secrets of the



13. John Dee's "Holy Table" from A True & Faithful Relation of What passed for many Yeers Between Dr. John Dee (...) and Some Spirits (London, 1659)

cosmos. Without a doubt, this tradition was popular in Rudolfine Prague as a few isolated instances attest: Rudolf II explicitly requested to have a copy of the *Clavicula* delivered from the Vienna library to Prague,[119] the Italian Jew Colorni had translated a Hebrew version of this grimoire into Italian,[120] and the Jewish chamberlain Philipp Lang von Langenfels is said to have "used" the *Sigillum Salomonis*.[121] The amulet therefore fits smoothly into this aspect of Rudolfine culture.

Astrology, theology, mineralogy, (Christian) Kabbalah, angelic and (Pseudo-) Solomonic magic – many different fields of knowledge converge in this little piece of jewelry. It denies a simple and straightforward interpretation, yet, this is what makes it such a significant artwork for the Rudolfine cosmos that was coined by so many different mentalities. The term "pansophy" is usually employed to describe this phenomenon to think beyond the boundaries of one discipline caused by a "craving for universal knowledge"[122] – the unattainable goal restricted for the world's end. One might even say the quest for omniscience was the immaterial counterpart to the alchemists' philosophers' stone on which Rudolf II also wasted immense sums.[123] A problem inherent in the methodology of pansophy is that by studying many different fields at the same time, the overall context becomes lost. Out of this dilemma developed, in Erich Trunz's words, "Vielwisserei" and "Polyhistorie" instead of omniscience.[124] This polyvalence is also present in the amulet's multilayered and ambiguous iconography. Yet, this does not weaken its importance as a valuable "document" of the Rudolfine mindset. It is a materialized pansophic attempt that allows an intimate insight into the complex relationships between the different intellectual trends prevalent in Prague around 1600 and an expression of the common urge to "know it all."

111 See for example Pietro d'Abano's *Heptameron* which was published together with Agrippa's *De occulta philosophia* and therefore widely known. C.f. Frenschkowski (note 19), pp. 531–550, particularly the figures on pp. 533 and 539. With further references to different manuscripts: http://www.esotericarchives.com/solomon/heptamer.htm (July 13th, 2020).

112 London, British Library, MS 3188, fol. 10r.

113 Whitby (note 104), pp. 134–137.

114 The alphabet is given in: Robert Turner, *The Heptarchia Mystica of John Dee: A primer of hermetic science and magical procedures by the Elizabethan scholar-mage* (Wellingborough, 1986), p. 87. Cf. Wayne Shumaker, *Renaissance Curiosa* (New York, 1982), p. 25.

115 Whitby (note 104), pp. 132–134.

116 Ibidem, p. 131.

117 Turner (note 114), pp. 76–78; Whitby (note 105), pp. 129–131; Harkness (note 76), p. 38.

118 These elements have been conceived as irritating on a "Jewish" product. Cf. Swersky (note 1), p. 34.

119 Richterová (note 20), p. 102.

120 Jütte (note 54), pp. 228–231. There is a number of manuscripts that are supposed to be based on the translation by Colorni. An example is Vienna, ÖNB, Cod. 11262 (see fig. 2). Cf. Federico Barbierato, *Nella stanza dei circoli. "Clavicula Salomonis" e libri di magia a Venezia nei secoli XVII e XVIII* (Milan, 2002), pp. 41–43.

121 Friedrich von Hurter, *Philipp Lang: Kammerdiener Kaiser Rudolphs II: Eine Criminal-Geschichte aus dem Anfang des siebzehnten Jahrhunderts* (Schaffhausen, 1851), pp. 157 and 210.

122 Robert John Weston Evans, *Rudolf II and his world: A study in intellectual history 1576–1612* (Oxford, 1973), p. 252.

123 *Alchymie a Rudolf II. Hledání tajemství přírody ve střední Evropě v 16. a 17. století*, ed. by Ivo Purš and Vladimír Karpenko (Prague, 2011); *Alchemy and Rudolf II* (note 20).

124 Erich Trunz, Pansophie und Manierismus im Kreise Kaiser Rudolfs II., in *Die österreichische Literatur: Ihr Profil von den Anfängen im Mittelalter bis ins 18. Jahrhundert (1050–1750)*, ed. by Fritz Peter Knapp and Herbert Zeman (Graz, 1986), pp. 865–986 (868).